

The next two years passed in a flash.

For perhaps the first time ever, Amethyst met her match in the form of her own son. His relentless drive to become a Huntsman wore her down, and no matter how brutally she rejected his pleas, he didn't stop. What once was a weekly question became daily. Sometimes it was the first words out of his mouth in the morning, pleading to be sent to a combat school. Her cool dismissal did nothing to dampen his spirits and only lit a spark inside him, which quickly roared into an inferno. His father did his best to keep him busy but it only helped him in the end, the hard labor further strengthening his body.

In addition to doing his chores, he also began training in secret, borrowing the sword and shield above the mantle piece, sneaking away in the early morning or dark of night to swing the blade until his arms felt like they were going to fall off. In truth, it wasn't really training. He didn't learn how to fight from doing this but it accustomed his body to the weight of the sword, and to the repetitive motions of slashing and stabbing, even if his form was all wrong.

Then the day came when she finally had enough.

Jaune didn't get his wish of being sent to a combat school but a tutor was hired, one of the retired Huntsmen that lived in Hamersley. Beneath the disappointed eyes of his mother, Jaune accepted beating after beating, unwilling to give up, no matter how hard he was thrashed. At first, he was pretty sure that this was another ploy to have him give up on his dream but somewhere along the way, he earned the respect of his teacher.

That was the day his aura was unlocked.

It was not a planned occurrence. His tutor didn't purposefully unlock it. No, it was done in the heat of another sparring session, when Jaune thought he was in real danger. Every hit was harder than usual, and there was no pause when the expected time came. For one wild moment, Jaune thought the man was trying to kill him, and then the next, his aura leapt to his defence, a rush of power so potent that his tutor ended up in the dirt, staring up at him in surprise as a golden light erupted from Jaune's skin.

From that day on, his mother's final hope was dashed.

It hurt to disappoint her. It hurt to see that look in her eyes, as if he had failed her in some way. Failed to live up to the ideal she placed on him, as her only son. His father was more optimistic and tried to act as a buffer, telling him that one day, Huntsman or not, he would inherit, and to be prepared for that day.

And he would be. One day, this land would be his and he wouldn't shirk his duty. But it was still seen as a betrayal, and Jaune felt it in every word exchanged between himself and his mother, right up until the day he was accepted into Beacon.

His tutor was a former student and had some sway, and his recommendation was accepted. Jaune had worried about tuition since he didn't have a scholarship from attending a preparatory school and graduating, and his savings weren't nearly enough.

But he shouldn't have worried. Even though his actions had caused her great disappointment and anger, never let it be said that Amethyst Arc would ever allow anyone to question the Arc family and its standing, and wealth.

"A slight against you is a slight against me, against our family," her voice was cold. It was the voice she used *that day*, a voice she never used with family. It was a voice he had earned, in her eyes. "You are a son of the Arc family, and will not go wanting. Everything will be covered, and I will spare no expense. Be grateful that your mother is so caring."

Jaune kept his eyes lowered, not wanting to see the frustration in her eyes. His father was silent by her side, observing quietly.

“Thank you, mother.”

“A home will be prepared for you,” she continued. “I’ve read up on this... *school* of yours. Students are not required to stay on campus, and so you will be staying in the city.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“I’ve already contacted them and made the arrangements,” she said sharply. Jaune grimaced. “I will not have my son living in a dormitory, this isn’t a negotiation.”

Jaune didn’t have it in him to argue, not over something like this. He might be as stubborn as his mother was, but he was nowhere near as petty. He would fight tooth and nail for his dreams, but for this, he could not muster the energy required.

“Fine,” he sighed. “I get it.”

“Good,” she sounded pleased that he gave up without much fuss. “You will also be accompanied on this adventure of yours.”

Jaune finally looked up, startled. “What?”

Amethyst clapped her hands, once. The door to his father’s study opened and in stepped Kali, her head bowed.

"You will be accompanied by Kali and that *girl*," slowly, Blake entered behind her mother. Just by looking at her, he could see the fear in the stiffness of her stance, and the way her hands were clasped together. "I have no need for them here. They are now yours. They will look after your every need."

Jaune almost spoke up but then paused, thinking better of it. This wasn't a bad thing, not at all. One of his only regrets about becoming a Huntsman was having to leave them behind, particularly Blake. He wanted to protect her but Beacon was four years of study, meaning he would only ever see her during the holidays.

But now she would be with him the whole time.

She didn't know it but his mother had just given him the best thing he could have ever hoped for, short of her approval. Jaune wondered if there was some ulterior motive behind the decision but couldn't figure it out. He tried not to let it show on his face, lowering his head.

"Yes, mother."

"Their actions reflect on you, and on our family," Amethyst said sternly. "Keep them in line. Any misbehavior must be punished. Do *not* embarrass us."

"...I won't."

"Good."

Jaune was traveling to Vale via the train, and his mother did not come to see him off. His father did, as well as his sisters, but her absence was a glaring omission. He thought he would be used to her callousness by now but he wasn't, and it was a wound that festered.

"It will take time but she will come around," Aureolin placed his large hand on his shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

"Do you really believe that?" Jaune asked bitterly.

"I do," he nodded. "We did not want this life for you but you showed me with your effort and determination that you really wanted this. That this wasn't just a passing desire. You were serious, and you put in the hard work to get here. You earned that recommendation, son. I am proud of you."

Unexpectedly, Jaune felt teary eyed. Clenching his jaw, he hugged his father furiously. "Why can't she see it the same way?"

"She will," Aureolin promised. "Right now, all she can see is your defiance. Your mother is not used to being defied by anyone, so you've placed her in a spot she is unaccustomed to. She will get over it."

He hoped his father was right.

Even though Sapphire and Saphron had been in his corner since the start, they were sad to see him go. He hugged all of his sisters, one at a time, promising them that he would take care of himself and bring back souvenirs when the school year ended.

Then he was boarding the train as the workers began loading his luggage, Kali and Blake joining him in his compartment. The train was primarily a cargo train but it had a few carriages for travel. One of which was all to himself, almost like a little apartment on tracks.

"Would you like something to drink, Master?" Kali asked as he got seated.

"I'm fine, Kali, thank you."

Blake sat down opposite him, disgruntled.

Things between them had improved since the night of his fifteenth birthday but Jaune would be lying if he said things had returned to how they were before. She continued to chafe beneath her role as property, and while logically she knew he had nothing to do with it, there were occasions when her anger got the better of her and she lashed out.

He was the only person she could vent her frustrations around beyond her mother, since anyone else would ensure she was punished for it.

Whenever Kali called him 'Master', it got under her skin. Even though other servants and workers of the family also used such titles when addressing them, it had a deeper meaning for faunus. They hadn't even left the station and she was already in a foul mood.

"Blake might want something," he suggested. Sullen amber eyes refused to look at him.

"Blake," Kali chided softly. "Would you like a drink?"

"I can get it myself," she muttered, crossing her arms. "I don't need you to serve it to me."

Kali sighed, shaking her head.

Vale was quite far away and Hamersley was the last stop on the line, but because all the cargo had been dropped off on the way there, they had an express line back to the city. Even though they didn't have to stop anywhere, it would still take most of the day to arrive.

Jaune was filled with a sudden bout of nerves as the train began to move, and it persisted for much of the ride. For the first time in his life, he would be away from his family. But at least he wasn't completely alone.

Hours passed and with it, countless acres of forest and the occasional town. Thankfully, the train remained unmolested by Grimm between points of civilisation, and it was early evening when they began approaching the immediate surroundings of the city of Vale. In the distance, Jaune could see the towering walls that protected the city from Grimm, rolling fields of grass transitioning into sprawling lanes of homes as they passed through a tunnel and into the city itself.

He looked around with wide eyes and he wasn't the only one, Blake's face practically glued to the window as she looked around in wonder. Neither of them had visited such a place before and they were left in awe of how big it was, buildings as far as the eye could see.

But that wasn't all.

It was the people.

Hundreds, no – *thousands*. Jaune stared as they passed by streets packed with bustling crowds, the roads thick with traffic. He'd never seen so many people in one place before and it was a little overwhelming, eyes darting around to take everything in.

As the train pulled into the station, they prepared to disembark. Workers rushed to unload any cargo they'd loaded onto the train, much of which came from their farm. Meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables were wheeled out onto the platform in large refrigerated containers to be loaded onto trucks.

There weren't many passengers. Only a handful of people from other towns that had boarded before them, and they were quickly shown to the customs officers. Once Jaune had his luggage, he took a deep breath and approached.

"Papers," a bored woman asked, holding out her hand. Jaune rummaged around in his bag and pulled out the required documents, handing them over. She went over them quickly, glancing up to check his face against the photo before stamping them. Then she frowned, looking either side of him.

"Where are their collars?" she asked sharply.

Jaune blinked. "What?"

"Their collars," she stressed. "Faunus cannot be in public without collars and identifying tags."

"O-Oh, right," Jaune stammered, searching through his bags once more. He'd been told about this but had completely forgot, stashing the two leather bands at the bottom of his luggage.



Blake looked outraged but didn't fight him when he looped one around her neck, securing it. Even she wasn't silly enough to make a scene in front of an officer. There was a small beep as the electronic lock was aligned, and the shock collar was activated. There was a remote in his bag to use them should they become unruly but he left it buried at the bottom, sick at the thought of it. Kali simply looked resigned and gave him a small smile as she spotted his apologetic look, offering her neck.

Each collar had a small tag with their name and a number, as well as a barcode. The woman scanned each one with her scroll and nodded.

"Everything appears to be in order. They must be collared at all times while outside, and leashed in highly populated areas," she explained.

"Uh," Jaune hesitated. "I don't have... any leashes."

His mom hadn't mentioned anything about this.

"We can provide you with some," the woman reached into a bag on her hip and pulled out two plastic bags, a long leash rolled up in each one. "Free of charge."

"Oh, um – thanks?"

"Welcome to the city of Vale, please enjoy your stay," she said blandly. "Just walk through that gate and follow the arrows out."

If looks could kill, all the people around them would be dead from the murderous expression on Blake's face. Her eyes burned with rage as she was walked like a common animal, hands balled by her side. Jaune felt horrible but there was nothing he could do about it, not unless he wanted

them all to get in trouble, and so he walked the pair of them out as they pulled his luggage for him.

The station was packed with people and Jaune found it difficult to navigate, or would have. When people saw Kali and Blake, they parted around them, as if they were repulsed at the thought of potentially touching them. As if they were avoiding an unknown dog. Will it bite? Was it friendly? He could tell by the set of Blake's shoulders that she was getting even more upset.

Even though people avoided them like they had the plague, they openly stared and whispered. They weren't the only faunus, Jaune spotted many others with collars and leashes attached, but he was the only one walking two at the same time. Maybe that was strange? Was there some strange type of rule about it? Or maybe it was because of how young he was. All the other owners were at least thirty, well into adulthood.

He didn't know.

When they finally made it outside onto the bustling streets, Jaune paused to consult the instructions he'd been given. He had a couple of addresses written down. One was for Beacon's city offices where he would pick up his information pack, and be issued with his new scroll. The other address was his new home for the next four years.

One of the leashes suddenly pulled tight and Jaune looked up, startled. Kali had noticed him come to stop and had paused, but Blake had continued walking. She coughed as the collar tightened around her throat, choking her, tears gathering in her eyes as she clutched at the band around her neck.

"Blake," Jaune exclaimed, loosening the leash as he rushed over to her. "Are you okay?"

"D-Don't touch me," she hissed, recoiling as he reached for her. Jaune froze, hurt by the visceral reaction.

“Blake,” he said softly.

He felt awful. He’d stopped without warning and she’d nearly choked herself because of it. A group of teenagers nearby saw everything and were pointing, laughing.

“What are you laughing at?” Blake shouted angrily, glaring at them, but it only made the group laugh harder. One of them even snapped a picture.

“Blake,” Kali said sternly. “Behave.”

The look of outrage and betrayal on Blake’s face was poignant.

Jaune managed to find a taxi, and his luggage was quickly loaded into the back before Kali and Blake were secured by their leashes to the doors, a ‘safety measure’. Wasn’t the shock collars enough? But apparently this was a common thing on public transport, as he saw people getting on a nearby bus, their faunus secured to the railings inside.

Their first stop was the Beacon offices. He met with a nice elderly woman who got everything set up, transferring all his data from his old scroll to his new one, explaining how the new features worked like the aura reader, and handing over the information packet. It took less than ten minutes, and then they were on the move again.

His new home was in a very nice neighborhood in the middle of downtown Vale, a series of old red brick town houses with small yards, the clean streets heavily patrolled by police. It had everything you would ever need within walking distance, including the airship terminal that Jaune would be catching an airship from every morning to Beacon.

A man in a sharp suit was waiting for them on the stoop.

“Mr. Arc,” the man greeted, offering a hand. “Right on time.”

Was he? Jaune shook his hand politely.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know who you are.”

“My name is Gerold Cloudberry. I work for your family.”

He did? His confusion must have shown because Mr. Cloudberry smiled.

“I am a lawyer. I help secure contracts for your family for their goods.”

“Oh,” Jaune said, still a little thrown. “Uh – right. It’s nice of you to greet us.”

“Certainly. Your mother instructed me to make sure you arrived safely and to hand over the keys,” reaching into his coat pocket, he pulled out the aforementioned keys, and a large manilla envelope. “This is the deed to the house. Keep that safe.”

“Oh, uh, thanks.”

“Would you like a tour of the house?”

“Er – no, that’s fine, thanks. I’m sure we can see for ourselves.”

“Excellent. If you need anything – anything at all – you can contact me on this number,” he handed over a business card with his name, number and the address of his offices. “I’ve been instructed to help in any way I can.”

“Right,” Jaune pocketed the card. “Thanks. For everything.”

Kali and Blake unloaded the taxi while he paid the driver. Jaune spotted a few curious heads in windows, nosy neighbors checking out the new blood. This neighbourhood wasn’t what was deemed a high population area, so Jaune unleashed the pair of them quickly.

Kali smiled in appreciation while Blake sulked, refusing to look at him. Sighing, he climbed the steps and unlocked the front door, stepping into what could only be described as a lavish foyer, the hardwood floors dark and polished to a fine shine. There was a coat and hat rack by the door, and an umbrella stand, the walls covered in off-white wallpaper decorated with golden sigils. Paintings hung on the walls, beautiful, sweeping landscapes; forests, rolling grassy knolls, small rustic towns, expertly brought to life by skillful hands. A large chandelier hung above, countless shards of crystal casting beautiful illumination.

His mom really had gone all out. Not for his benefit but for the benefit of the family. Anyone that saw this place would know immediately that his family was wealthy, if the neighborhood didn’t tell them that already.

Kali wasn't surprised and stepped inside, his luggage in tow. On the other hand, Blake appeared hesitant, peering around as if the walls would open up and swallow her. The door on the left led to the kitchen, and it was well stocked with all the latest appliances. Stainless steel pots and pans hung from hooks above the white marble counter top, the refrigerator seamlessly built into the wall, appearing just like another cupboard until it was pulled open. It was big enough to fit several people inside and already filled with food, chilled and waiting. The rest of the cupboards were also filled.

The door on the right led to the living room, furnished with old Valean era couches with a large hardwood coffee table, the wood floors covered in a massive rug. There was a fireplace complete with a box filled with cut firewood, a massive television, and more seating. As they entered, on the left was a pair of double doors that led into the dining room. The table was capable of serving twelve people easily, ornate candle holders set upon the surface.

This place was ridiculous. Their home on the farm was nice, really nice, but this place was something else.

The second floor was dedicated to the bedrooms, of which there were five. The two smallest were clearly for children but had been set aside for Kali and Blake, several more sets of their maid uniforms neatly arranged on their beds. While the rooms were small, it was still an improvement from what they had before. They no longer had to share.

This was also where the bathroom and toilet was located, one of two. Jaune's bedroom was huge with an en suite, his personal bathroom and toilet, and the closet was large enough for Jaune to ride one of their horses through it. It was also fully stocked with clothes, all in his size or a little bigger for him to grow into. There was casual wear, shirts and simple pants, jeans, shorts – and then there was more formal wear; suits, expensive trousers, button down shirts, polo's, even a tuxedo.

And countless pairs of shoes. Drawers filled with underwear, socks, ties. Even accessories like watches and cufflinks.

“Can you get these things off us?” Blake snapped suddenly, tugging at the collar around her neck. “We don’t need to wear them in here, do we?”

Jaune blinked. “Oh, er – yeah, let me take them off.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t remove them straight away,” she muttered under her breath as he quickly unlocked the collar. Blake stepped away and rubbed at her neck.

“Sorry, I forgot.”

She scowled at him. “Must be nice to be able to *forget*. Aren’t you lucky.”

Feeling foolish, he removed the one from Kali’s neck.

“Thank you, Master.”

That only soured Blake’s mood further.

Trying to regain lost ground, he said, “Call me Jaune. Please. We’re alone here, so it’s fine.”

Kali nodded. “Of course, Jaune.”

Blake clicked her tongue. "This is bullshit. They have our people leashed like animals and you're just playing along."

Kali considered her daughter. "Did you not go along with it also?"

Jaune could see Blake wanted to say something nasty but Kali spoke nothing but the truth, and it galled her.

"And you were smart to go along with it," Kali continued. "What do you think would have happened if you didn't?"

The answer was obvious, so Blake remained silent. Stewing in her anger.

Jaune felt awkward, trapped between mother and daughter.

"I'm going to check out the rest of the house," he said lamely. "You must be hungry, right? We didn't eat much on the train."

"Would you like me to prepare something, Ma—Jaune?" Kali corrected herself.

His stomach gurgled loudly. Blake scoffed.

"Um — that would be nice of you, but make something for yourselves first. Take whatever you want."



The third floor had an office with a small library, reminiscent of his father's study at home. There was another living room up here, as well, something a little more intimate and private. Beyond that, there was an impressive balcony with a handsome table and chairs, potted plants and a beautiful view of the park across the street.

The roof was an open terrace with a blooming garden, every shade of color captured on the petals of the flowers arranged on the outskirts. The middle was a square of perfectly maintained lawn, and the view from up here was even better than the one from the balcony.

This was his home for the next four years of his life, if things went well.

Jaune sighed as he looked out across the neighborhood, the late afternoon sun creating a halo of orange around distant buildings. Further beyond he could see the glittering water of the ocean, sparking like a carpet of gemstones. Turning around, he set his eyes on the looming cliffs on the other side of the city, the awe inspiring waterfalls cascading down the rock face, and further up, the old spires of Beacon Academy itself.

He was finally here.